

1201 – Child Placement Services

IX. AFTERCARE SERVICES

A. Social Work Practice Guidelines for Services after Foster Care Placement Ends

1. Preparing the Child

Whether a child has been in foster care for a short or a long period of time, the move out of care is equally as significant as the move into care. The child may have conflicting feelings about the change in living arrangements. It is the social worker's responsibility to help him/her express and understand these conflicting feelings and to move gradually toward making the change. The social worker should plan with the child appropriately in relation to his/her age and the kinds of responsibilities the child can take in getting ready for the move.

Whether a child is being discharged from family foster care, relative placement or from institutional care, the caretaker should plan with the social worker for the move and participate in preparing the child for the changes. Changes in living arrangements usually mean changes in relationships. If it is appropriate, the child may need to visit his/her former placement after discharge.

Services may be extended by the agency to youth ages 13 to 21 who leave foster care and meet the eligibility requirements for LINKS services, regardless of their living arrangement and whether the agency retains custody or placement responsibility of the youth during this time. This extension of services will allow the social worker to provide needed support to the youth after discharge from foster care placement. The services should be based upon an assessment of the youth's needs, to assist him/her in making a successful transition to living independently.

Youth exiting foster care at age 18, shall be provided:

- An official or certified copy of his or her US birth certificate
- A social security card issued by the Commissioner of Social Security
- Health insurance information such as how to access expanded Medicaid until age 26 as per the federal Affordable Care Act,
- A copy of the child's health and education records, and
- A driver's license or identification card.

The agency will need to document that these records have been given to the youth.

2. Preparing the Family for Reunification

The child and family have changed during the time of placement. Even over a matter of months, the child will have achieved developmental milestones, will have formed new relationships with foster parents, and may have new interests. Families will have adjusted their daily routines around the absence of the child. Parents may have learned new parenting skills that have impact on the familiar family practices. With foresight and planning, the social worker will have kept the child and family abreast of these changes. When foster parents are encouraged to work with the birth families, both the child and the family can benefit from a significant increase in the amount of information shared. Visitation between the family and child will have been frequent and, with court approval, unsupervised visits will have increased in frequency.

As the family moves toward reunification, the social worker should be very sensitive to the fears of the family. They may be afraid that they are not ready for the child's return and that they could lose their child again. The social worker should work with the family to assure that needed supports are in place. Family Preservation Services may be included during the trial placement period or as part of the aftercare plan in order to further stabilize the family.

3. Preparing the Adoptive Family or Other Permanent Caregiver

Chapter VI: Adoption Services; Section 1301

(<http://info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-50/man/CSs1301.pdf>)

contains in-depth information on working with adoptive families. If the adoptive family or other permanent caregiver has not lived with the child, the agency has a responsibility to arrange for a transitional period of visitation to help the child and family learn about each other. The adoptive family shall be provided with all information that is relevant to the child's history, relationships, behaviors, health, interests, and educational needs. Non-identifying information about the child's birth family should be provided to the adoptive family so that the child will be able to know the reason for his/her adoption. The child's Life Book should be given to the adopting family.

The agency shall make post-adoption services available to every adoptive family. These services shall be provided to facilitate the integration of the child and family and to resolve problems they may encounter. The agency shall provide regular and ongoing support, monitoring, and/or counseling of the family as appropriate. A referral to Family Preservation Services may be appropriate for post-adoption services.

Guardians and legal custodians should also be made aware of available services so that they can select services that they need. If they indicate no need for services, they should be informed that services are available to them, should they need them at a later time.

4. Preparing the Foster Family

The foster family needs the social worker's full support and recognition of the contributions they have made in the child's life. The foster family should be informed of why the county has reached a decision to move a child to a permanent placement. Such information and preparation will help the foster family come to an acceptance and understanding of these events so that they can help a child adjust to the move. If it is in the best interest of the child, a contact with the foster home should be arranged by the agency after a child has moved to a more permanent placement.

B. Termination of Services

The agency should establish a minimum time period for providing supportive aftercare services and supervision to the child and his/her permanent family. In most cases, agency supervision can be terminated after six months unless the Court orders otherwise and/or the final Risk Reassessment indicates additional service needs. When a child is reunified with his/her family, the social worker shall complete the Family Risk Reassessment within 30 days of case closure. The agency shall inform families and children that they can request services from the agency and obtain these services on a voluntary basis, as available.